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Healthy Forests Initiative Becomes Law

Firefighter Input Is Praised

by Patricia Klintberg
Office of Communications

On December 3, President **George W. Bush** signed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 into law at a ceremony at USDA headquarters in Washington DC. Surrounded by Forest Service Hot Shot team members from California and other Forest Service employees, Bush said that with the new law: "we will help save lives and property, and we'll help protect our forests from sudden and needless destruction."

Today about 190 million acres of federal lands are at risk of severe wildfires due to uncharacteristic fuel build-up, disease, and insect infestation. "In two years' time, fires throughout the country have burned nearly 11 million acres," Bush said. In California alone, more than 739,000 acres burned and at least 3,600 homes were destroyed.

"Just as USDA helps farmers and ranchers be better stewards of their land, the new law will give us new tools to better manage lands that are under federal ownership," said Secretary **Ann M. Veneman**.

One of the driving forces to reduce fuel build-up in forests is the firefighters themselves. "The principles behind the Healthy Forests Initiative were not invented in the White House, and, truthfully, not invented in the Congress. They

are founded on the experience of scientists, forestry experts, and as importantly, the firefighters who know what they're talking about," Bush said.

Leslie Weldon, supervisor of the Deschutes National Forest in Oregon, agrees. "Our biggest concern is to limit how we put people at risk. The goal is to change and prevent certain fire behavior to reduce risk after fires get started," she said.

For example, 91,000 acres of Oregon's Deschutes and Willamette National Forests burned last summer. "I have never seen a fire that big," Weldon said. Yet within the burned area, acreage that had been treated to reduce fuels burned differently. "Where we had done thinning, reduced fuel, and made more space between trees, the fire burned closer to the ground, burning brush and leaving more fire-resistant trees," she said.

In contrast, areas that weren't treated saw the fires crown—jumping from treetop to treetop—burning so hot that trees exploded. "The last thing you want is firefighters in there," said **Susan Yonts-Shepard**, the Forest Service's associate deputy chief for programs, legislation, and communications. "In addition to being enormously risky for any firefighter, a fire that burns that hot has a detrimental effect on the soil, wildlife habitat, and the watershed," she said.

The new law emphasizes hazardous fuel reduction through various methods including thinning and prescribed fire on up to 20

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"From one Capitol dome to another Capitol dome," observes **Rick Kline**, a Forest Service law enforcement officer on the Boise National Forest, as he inspects the 2003 Capitol Holiday Tree trailer at its first community stop in Boise, Idaho—in the shadow of that state's Capitol dome. The shrink-wrap protecting the tree is decorated with logos of many of the sponsors of this year's Capitol Holiday Tree. The tree, a 61-foot Engelmann spruce, came from the Boise National Forest. It's the 40th Capitol Holiday Tree to grace the lawn of the U.S. Capitol—its final stop. Note **Cyd Weiland's** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY LINDA STEINHAUS**

How We're Shaping Our "Workforce Of The Future"

by **Jim Rasekh**
FSIS Public Health and Science staff

All agencies at USDA work in the present, but look to the future. Employees at a number of agencies in the Department have been looking and planning for the future through their respective "Workforce of the Future" initiatives—and those approaches might prove helpful to still other agencies at USDA.

For instance, in 1999 the Food Safety and Inspection Service began introducing new positions into its workforce. First, FSIS food inspectors—located at federally inspected meat and poultry processing plants around the country—were converted and upgraded to technical "Consumer Safety

Inspectors." Next, FSIS introduced the professional "Consumer Safety Officer" position, which includes a science education requirement to qualify. According to **Billy Milton**, assistant administrator for FSIS's Office of Management, both of those occupations support the agency's focus on public health.

"Those occupations also offer current FSIS employees more interesting work, better pay, and more career options," he said. Many current employees, for example, have acquired the college credits to successfully compete for Consumer Safety Officer positions.

In 1999 the agency formed a Workforce of the Future Steering Committee. According to **Yvonne Davis**, acting FSIS human capital officer, the Steering Committee was formed to help involve the FSIS workforce of today in shaping the

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Ann M. Veneman

Secretary of Agriculture

“Peace on Earth” is an appropriate phrase during this holiday season. Achieving peace and security around the world takes the dedication of

many, including USDA employees.

For example, in November I traveled to Afghanistan and Iraq to view efforts to rebuild agriculture in those countries. I was able to see firsthand what a difference USDA employees and programs are making.

In Afghanistan, where we have provided over \$42 million in food aid, donated U.S. wheat is made into bread at local bakeries, providing employment to women and bread at reduced prices to those who need it. Wheat, rice, lentils, and vegetable oil donated under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program will provide take-home food rations to 37,000 school children and several hundred teachers in western Afghanistan. U.S. powdered milk will go to more than 20,000 children. Some donated commodities are sold locally and the proceeds are used to finance rural development projects.

In addition, three USDA employees with wide-ranging experience in forestry, conservation, and the development of cooperatives have been assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs, which are deployed nationwide. We are also providing technical assistance to help establish an Afghan Conservation Corps that will provide jobs in restoring

soil and water resources for thousands of unemployed Afghans.

It was most telling to see so many people in Afghanistan show so much appreciation for the American presence there and say to us, “Please don’t leave.”

In Iraq, I was struck by the squander of the enormous potential of the country in terms of human and natural resources. Iraq has a long agricultural tradition. For example, wheat was cultivated for centuries, well before the time of **Christ**, but the sector suffers from decades of isolation, neglect, and outright terrorism by **Saddam Hussein**, who often cut off water to some of the most productive agriculture areas.

USDA has donated over \$100 million to Iraq in food aid to help this once productive country feed its people and rebuild its infrastructure. One of our employees knows about that rebuilding effort firsthand. Iraq’s Minister of Agriculture calls USDA’s **Danny Woodyard**, a reservist from Arkansas, a hero. Early on Danny went in and found the appropriate people to contract with to rebuild the agricultural ministry, which had been badly damaged during the war.

The work we do around the world is critical to the well-being of so many. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these efforts to help fight the War on Terror and bring “Peace on Earth” and security to all people.

May your holidays be merry and joyful and best wishes for a very happy new year. ■

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public health workforce of tomorrow. “As much as possible,” she said, “FSIS wants to ‘leave no employee behind’ in this transformation.”

Today, the Steering Committee is a diverse group of about 30 FSIS employees working throughout the country. “I believe that what is unique about it is that it includes the frontline employees who carry out our agency’s mission to ensure food safety and protect public health,” said Davis.

“One of its first accomplishments was to establish 11 guiding principles for the transition to the workforce of the future,” said **Cynthia Mercado**, special assistant for diversity to the FSIS administrator. “They have been adopted by the agency and help ensure that employees are treated fairly and consistently.”

“In 2000,” said **Randy Wurtele**, FSIS labor relations specialist, “the Steering Committee helped work out a mechanism, with the Union that represents inspectors, to identify those FSIS food inspectors in specific areas of the country who met the educational requirement for the Consumer Safety Officer position. This enabled FSIS to tailor its recruitment to ensure qualified employees could get the first crack at the 30 new professional positions.” FSIS now has hundreds of Consumer Safety Officers, many from the ranks of the FSIS inspection force.

FSIS Administrator **Garry McKee** has asked the Steering Committee to provide feedback and recommendations on a variety of issues with workforce implications. For example, the committee’s recommendations for an employ-

ee orientation program and regional training sites have been adopted and are now being implemented. FSIS is in the process of filling six regional training coordinator positions.

At its September 23-25 meeting focusing on career paths, the Steering Committee recommended a formal career counseling service accessible to all FSIS employees. McKee has endorsed the concept and given the go-ahead for a feasibility study.

“Employees are responsible for their own futures—but the agency can make it easier for them to build their own long-term career paths,” said **Christine Sinclair**, FSIS human resources specialist on the Workforce Transition Management Staff. “We want there to be only meaningful and productive jobs in FSIS.”

Other USDA agencies have initiated creative programs which focus on their own workforce of the future. For instance, the Food and Nutrition Service developed what it calls its “FNS University,” or FNSU, in part to offer various forms of technical, leadership, and human relations training to meet its perceived workforce needs in the future. According to **Geoff Gay**, a branch chief in FNS’s Human Resources Division, it is aiming to close “competency skill gaps” by providing an agency-wide training plan addressing identified skill gaps in a consistent manner across FNS. For the first time this training plan now reaches the agency’s many field offices, through a program of FNSU called the “Field Academy.”

At the same time, FNS is attempting to deal with “succession planning” in the agency by

offering leadership training to its managers of the future—through a program of FNSU called the “Leadership Institute.”

Officials at the Agricultural Research Service knew that they needed a better way to lure the best research scientists into government work in general and to ARS in particular. So they devised a program, called the “Senior Scientific Research Service,” which gives USDA power to hire as many as 100 senior-level research scientists, at any one time, for ARS, the Forest Service, and the Economic Research Service through a streamlined process and at higher pay than was previously offered for senior research scientists. **Ray Leaman**, associate deputy administrator for administrative and financial management in the Research, Education, and Economics mission area, said the program formally commenced this past October.

The Sept.-Oct. 2003 issue of the **USDA News** carried a story on that program.

And the Human Capital Management Team in the Natural Resources Conservation Service received an award at USDA’s 57th Annual Honor Awards Ceremony, in June, for “designing and implementing Human Resources policies and programs that will meet the workforce needs of [NRCS] in the 21st century and beyond.”

“Because these agencies have been successful in applying creative approaches to their respective workforce planning initiatives,” said **Sharin Sachs**, an FSIS senior issues analyst, “other USDA agencies may want to consider these approaches—as we all try to meet the workforce challenges of the future.” ■

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

The final two months of the year were marked by a celebration of agency anniversaries, a trip to Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq in mid-November, and a promising year-end update on USDA accomplishments.

Ezra Taft Benson: On November 4, Secretary **Ann M. Veneman** celebrated the 50th anniversary of Agriculture Secretary **Ezra Taft Benson's** tenure under President **Dwight D. Eisenhower**.

"One of the first things he did was reorganize the Department, getting closer to the notion of today's mission areas," Veneman said. "For instance, he moved the Agriculture Conservation Program out of the Production and Marketing Administration and into the Soil Conservation Service, or what is now the Natural Resources Conservation Service."

"Secretary Benson oversaw the creation of the Foreign Agricultural Service, and we celebrated its 50th anniversary on this Patio just this year, earlier this year, as well. He established the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Agricultural Research Service. He helped create the Soil Bank to put production and demand in better line and promoted basic conservation," she said.

"In the landmark year of 1956, the Conservation Reserve Program came into existence as part of the Soil Bank Act, later followed by the Acreage Reserve. That was also the year that the Rural Development Program began. Secretary Benson expanded agricultural exports and a purchase program to remove excess commodities from the markets, and he helped to oversee the beginning of the surplus disposal program in international markets that became Public Law 480, named Food for Peace by President Eisenhower.

"When he left office, he was

asked about his work on behalf of American agriculture. After all the policy and legislative debates, after serving a President for two terms, after meeting with countless foreign leaders, he said his work as a county agent gave him the greatest satisfaction. 'Helping boys and girls grow up to be good farmers and good citizens,' he said, 'assisting neighbors to improve their fields, their livestock, their marketing, and their homes.' Those words speak volumes about Ezra Taft Benson," Veneman said.

The Middle East: In mid-November Secretary Veneman traveled to Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq to talk about food aid and other issues in those countries and to look at the general situation with regard to agriculture. Upon her return she participated in an electronic question and answer session on the White House website. Veneman said: "The reports that we see on the news are not always reflective of life every day in Iraq. There are lots of people on the streets, there are many shops that have opened since the removal of **Saddam Hussein**, there is traffic on the streets, children are going to school, and life in Iraq seems to be making significant progress forward."

"In response to your question about what would help agriculture in Iraq, one of the things that was most needed was information on current farming practices, research, better laboratory equipment for agriculture-related laboratories, and repair of water and irrigation systems in certain parts of the country."

"Having been to a college in Iraq, we discussed partnerships among U.S. colleges and universities and those in Iraq. Agriculture remains a very important industry in Iraq. While many people do not believe that Iraq would have much agriculture, it is indeed a country

rich in natural resources and water and a prime agriculture region. It is home to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which many call the birthplace of modern agriculture," Veneman said.

Later in the month Secretary Veneman commended **Daniel Amstutz** for his tenure as senior advisor for agriculture in Iraq. Amstutz, a former under secretary for international affairs and commodity programs, is returning to the private sector. **Lloyd Harbert**, a career Foreign Agricultural Service officer currently serving in Baghdad, will now coordinate USDA activities in the country.

"Food Safety And Food Security: What Consumers Need To Know": That's the title of a new USDA publication developed by the Food Safety and Inspection Service that provides useful tips for safe food preparation and for keeping food safe from contamination. It answers the following questions and more: "Do you know what to do or who to call to report possible food tampering? Do you know how long to safely keep canned tomatoes, versus meat and vegetables? What are the right temperatures for cooking chicken, beef, and lamb? And do you know the four food-handling rules to minimize the chances you or your family will experience foodborne illness?" The 15-page reference manual is available in English or Spanish from FSIS.

Salmonella In Meat Drops Markedly: Over the past six years the incidence of Salmonella in raw meat and poultry dropped 66 percent—and in 2003 it was down 16 percent from a year earlier. Under Secretary for Food Safety **Elsa Murano** attributed the decline to "strong, science-based enforcement of food safety rules."



Secretary **Ann M. Veneman** interacts with a group of children in northern Iraq, during her visit to that country in mid-November.—**PHOTO BY ALISA HARRISON**

Three Grants Will Promote Native American Participation In USDA Programs:

Secretary Veneman marked National American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month by announcing \$440,000 in competitive grants to three organizations under USDA's Native American Outreach Program. They are Langston University in Oklahoma, the Indian Nations Conservation Alliance in Montana, and the College of Menominee Nation in Wisconsin. "During this time, we celebrate the rich cultural traditions and proud ancestry of American Indians and Alaskan Natives," Veneman said. "We recognize the vital contributions these groups have made to the strength and diversity of our society."

Year-End Update On Key Issues:

On December 4, Secretary Veneman said that farm income and agricultural exports should stay strong in 2004 and consumer prices are expected to remain steady. Net cash farm income in 2003 will be at a record high, rebounding sharply from 2002 and above long-term averages. Net cash farm income is forecast to be \$65 billion, up 33 percent from 2002, she said. For the complete review go to www.usda.gov/news/releases/2003/12/0408.htm

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

Employees *make these things happen*

Natural Resources and Environment

40th Holiday Tree Graces Capitol This Year

For the first time ever, Idaho has provided this year's Capitol Holiday Tree, which is now lit and ready for viewing on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol that faces the Washington Monument in Washington, DC.

"It's a gorgeous tree—very full and dense," noted **Terry Fletcher**, the Forest Service's landscape architect on Idaho's Sawtooth National Forest, who oversaw the tree's selection, cutting, and transportation.

This year's tree, which came



*With the just-cut 2003 Capitol Holiday Tree upended and suspended in the background, FS landscape architect **Terry Fletcher** (far right) gives instructions to his 'binding crew' on what happens next. It took almost two days to bind the tree with parachute cord and nylon strapping, before it was ultimately shrink-wrapped in plastic for its trek to Washington, DC.—PHOTO BY LINDA STEINHAUS*

from the Boiling Springs area north of Crouch, Idaho on the Boise National Forest, is a 73-year-old, 11,000-pound, 61-foot Engelmann spruce, said **Scott Godfrey**, FS timber management assistant on the Emmett Ranger District.

"With our mountain roads in Idaho, it was a little tricky getting this tree out of the woods," recounted Fletcher. "The crane traveling behind the trailer, which was transporting the tree horizontally, had to pick up the trailer at three different spots along the road—just to safely get around the corners."

Three National Forests in southwest Idaho—the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth—joined forces to provide this year's tree. After the tree was cut and shrink-wrapped in plastic, a team of over 20 Forest Service employees and community leaders traveled to celebrations in 53 Idaho communities before heading east.

In Sun Valley, Idaho Governor **Dirk Kempthorne** led the town's parade on his motorcycle with the local Harley Owners Group.

Dave Olson, an FS public affairs officer for the Boise NF plus for this year's Capitol Holiday Tree project,

added that the Capitol Holiday Tree is provided each year by one of the nation's 155 national forests.

This is the 40th Capitol Holiday Tree, according to **Beverly Carroll**, an FS program analyst and national coordinator for the Capitol Holiday Tree. "Of those," she pointed out, "34 have been donated to Congress by the Forest Service, with the support of state and local communities, for use as the Capitol Tree."

According to **Dean Martens**, an FS soil scientist on the Payette NF who served as the travel team leader, the Capitol Holiday Tree arrived in Washington, DC on December 1. Boise NF administrative assistant **Charlie LaRose**, who coordinated the project's volunteer efforts, added that much of the tree's journey and related activities were funded through sponsors and donations.

Renee Bidiman, an FS information assistant on the Payette NF, also noted that this year's tree is decorated with over 4,000 ornaments made by students throughout the state of Idaho. "Two lucky students, along with their parents, won trips to Washington, DC to participate in the tree lighting,"

she added.

Accompanying the Capitol Holiday Tree on its trek east were three fir trees from the Idaho-based, family-owned tree farm of **Larry Cooke**, an environmental specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Washington State Office in Spokane. According to **Betty Schmitt**, NRCS public affairs officer in the Spokane office, Cooke's grand fir trees—all at least ten feet tall and all at least 14 years old—have since been decorated and are gracing the offices of Secretary **Ann M. Veneman**, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment **Mark Rey**, and NRCS Chief **Bruce Knight**, respectively.

Danny Ebert, an FS regional partnership coordinator, pointed out that the Capitol Holiday Tree—also called the "People's Tree"—is not to be confused with the National Christmas Tree, which grows on the Ellipse behind the White House.

The 2003 Capitol Holiday Tree, which was formally lit on December 11, will be lit each evening throughout the December holiday season.

—CYD WEILAND

Research, Education, and Economics

Here's How We're Promoting Ag Stats In The Classroom

George Washington was not only the country's first president, he was also its first crop reporter. He gathered information about agriculture so he could pass on to inquiring minds in England the lessons he had learned about farming in the 'new country.'

That tradition, carried on today by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, is being taught to America's rural, suburban, and urban youth through NASS's "Agriculture Counts" lesson plans, available on the agency's website.

According to **Janet Allen**, head of NASS's Marketing Section, NASS staffers worked with Oklahoma State University curriculum writers to develop lesson plans under the title of "Agriculture Counts Lesson Plans," and put them on the NASS web site. "We're using many of our NASS agricultural surveys and the last census of

agriculture as the foundation for our lesson plans," she explained. "That's what makes our effort unique from educational outreach initiatives, to students, by other agencies at USDA."

The lessons are structured for grades Kindergarten through 12 and incorporate agriculture and agricultural statistics into English, math, geography, and social studies.

To view and print NASS's lesson plans, go to the NASS web site at www.usda.gov/nass and click on "NASS Kids," then click on "Ag for Teachers," and finally click on "Agriculture Counts Lesson Plans." Lessons are available in PDF format by school grade and subject series.

NASS survey statistician **Debbie Norton** noted that when the mission of conducting the census of agriculture every five years moved from the U.S. Bureau of the Census to NASS in 1997, the lesson plans came with it.

"The Census Bureau had already developed

similar lesson plans for students, K through 12," she said. "But we worked with **Pat Thompson** with the 'Ag in the Classroom' program at Oklahoma State University, made the lesson plans more current, and shared the importance of ag statistics. Plus, we gathered teacher feedback to improve our lesson plans. And, for the first time, we put them on CDs."

In addition, they began using not only statistics from the census of agriculture but also statistics that NASS compiles on a regular basis on such subjects as crop yields, livestock sales, and different types of demographic data on farm and ranch operators.

NASS customer service representative **Barbara Tidwell** noted that, for instance, the overall lesson plan for grades 7-8 is called "This Land Is Our Land," while a lesson plan for grades 9-12 is called "Math—Making Sense

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Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Kate Coler is the deputy under secretary for food, nutrition, and consumer services.

From June 2002 until her appointment to this position Coler served as deputy administrator of the Food Stamp Program in the Food and Nutrition Service. She was director of government relations for the Washington, DC-based Food Marketing Institute from 1999-2002, focusing on legislative strategy for FMI's interests in agricultural issues, nutrition programs, and foreign trade.

From 1997-99 Coler served as the federal legislative representative for the Washington, DC-based American Bankers Association. She worked as the legislative director for U.S. Rep. **Tom Latham** (R-Iowa) from 1995-97, after having worked as a legislative assistant for [then] U.S. Rep. **Tom Ewing** (R-Ill.) from 1993-95. From 1988-93 she worked as a policy analyst for the Illinois State Legislature.

Suzanne Biermann, the previous deputy under secretary for food, nutrition, and consumer services, is now executive director of The Learning Center, based in Jackson, Wyo., which provides early learning programs and special education services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Teton and Sublette Counties, Wyo. ■



Curtis Anderson is the deputy administrator of the Rural Utilities Service.

Before joining USDA, from June 1995 until his appointment to this position Anderson served as chief financial officer, general counsel, and assistant secretary-treasurer for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture at its headquarters office in Washington, DC. He was an assistant to [then] U.S. Rep. **Barbara Vucanovich** (R-Nev.) during 1995.

From 1990-94 Anderson served as secretary to the board of both the Farm Credit Administration and the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation.

He worked as an attorney-advisor in the Solicitor's Office at the U.S. Department of the Interior from 1988-90. From 1983-88 he was an attorney in private practice in Tulsa, Okla., where his work included gas utility, interstate gas pipeline, and cellular telecommunications issues. ■



Chester Gipson is the deputy administrator for animal care in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

From November 2001 until his selection to this position Gipson

served as acting deputy administrator for animal care with APHIS. He was the agency's associate deputy administrator for veterinary services from 2000-2001, after having served as director of animal health programs in veterinary services from 1997-2000.

Gipson was the Tampa, Fla.-based director of the Southeastern Region for APHIS's veterinary services operations from 1996-97, after having served as assistant director at that location from 1990-96.

He began his career with the agency in 1979 as a veterinary medical officer in veterinary services in APHIS's Sheep, Goat, Equine, Ectoparasite, and Miscellaneous Disease Staff in Hyattsville, Md., and continued to work as a veterinary medical officer in veterinary services for APHIS until 1990.

Ron DeHaven, the previous deputy administrator for animal care in APHIS, is now that agency's deputy administrator for veterinary services. ■



Jerry Lohfink is director of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer's National Finance Center

in New Orleans, La.

From May 1998 until his selection for this position Lohfink served as deputy director of NFC. During his nearly 20 years at NFC he has also served as associate director of

its Information Resources Management Division, its financial management officer, chief of its Financial Information Branch, a senior financial analyst, and a program analyst.

From 1978-84 he served with the Agricultural Research Service at its [then] regional office in New Orleans. During his tenure there he worked as the assistant for finance to ARS's [then] regional administrator, the assistant budget and fiscal officer, a supervisory budget analyst, and a supervisory accounting technician.

John Ortego, the previous director of NFC, is now president and owner of Ortego & Associates, a business consulting firm based in New Orleans. ■



Randy Moore is the regional forester of the Forest Service's Eastern Region, headquartered in Milwaukee.

From August 1996 until his selection to this position Moore served as the forest supervisor of the Mark Twain National Forest, based in Rolla, Mo., after having been its deputy forest supervisor from 1994-96.

Moore began his USDA career as a soil scientist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Dickinson, N.D., in 1978, and then became a soil scientist with the

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of the Census."

"We're trying to teach kids why it's important to have agricultural statistics, and also teach suburban and urban kids that their food and clothing originates with farmers and ranchers, not the grocery or clothing store," explained NASS customer service representative **Sharon Powers**. "So, at NASS, we're using ag stats to spread the word to students on the basics about agriculture."

For instance, a lesson plan for fourth graders asks them to list their favorite snack and then list what agricultural commodities

were used in making that snack. "But then," explained NASS customer service coordinator **Pat Joyce**, "they are asked to review NASS statistics—which are provided as part of the lesson—and determine in what states those agricultural commodities were produced, and if they are produced in their home state." A lesson plan for high school students reinforces the concepts of 'mean' and 'median' to track crop yields in their home state and county—based on NASS statistics—and then poses the question of whether adding a processing plant might affect those statistics and add value to that crop.

NASS media specialist **Karen Cannon** noted that the agricultural census statistics currently in use in the lesson plans are based on the most recently completed census of agriculture, which is dated 1997. "But we plan to have our 2002 Census of Agriculture final data completed and tabulated sometime in the spring of 2004," she emphasized.

"So we'll be incorporating more current agricultural statistics into those lesson plans—to provide an even more current and relevant ag-based learning experience for students around the country."

—RON HALL

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Forest Service in Pueblo, Colo., in 1980.

Bob Jacobs, the previous regional forester of FS's Eastern Region, is now the regional forester of FS's Southern Region, headquartered in Atlanta. ■



The first question usually asked in this situation is: "So, did he decide to quit his job, once he realized what had happened?"

What had happened was that **Bill Bass** recently won \$1.8 million in the Missouri State Lottery jackpot.

Bass is a computer specialist with the Farm Service Agency's Kansas City Information Technology Services Technical Office in Kansas City, Mo.—and now also a millionaire.

"Well, not exactly—my lawyer now calls me a 'thousandaire,'" he

quipped, "since I opted to take an immediate lump sum of \$900,000, and from that I paid \$400,000 in state and federal taxes." The other option, he explained, was to receive \$72,000 annually for 25 years. "Hey, I'm 63," he laughed, "so I chose the best option for making sure that I really do see as much of that money as possible—*NOW!*"

Bass noted that the computer-picked ticket he bought from a local grocery store in Lee's Summit, Mo., was the only winning jackpot lottery ticket in Missouri for that day.

Bass recounted that over the years he would periodically purchase power ball and lottery tickets, and would spend about \$5 per purchase. This particular time he spent \$3 on power ball and \$2 on lottery tickets.

He explained that winning lottery numbers are announced on local television stations on Saturday evenings, but he usually waits for the Sunday newspaper to check the winning numbers before leav-

ing for church services.

However, on this particular Sunday he had extra errands to run, so didn't check the numbers until about 10:30 that night, after his wife had gone to bed.

As Bass relaxed in his favorite chair, he first checked the power ball numbers, but had no match on his ticket. He then checked the state lottery numbers. To his surprise, above the winning numbers it read, "One winning lottery ticket sold."

"I read the numbers—and they matched my ticket," he recalled. "So I lay my head back and closed my eyes briefly—and then took a second look at the numbers."

Again, the numbers matched his ticket. "I lay my head back again and closed my eyes again, and then took a third long look," he said. "The numbers still matched."

"At that point I decided to get my wife out of bed to confirm what I saw." She read the numbers—and then started screaming, "We won! We won!"

Bass advised that he and his wife

decided that they didn't want this literal good fortune to disrupt what he describes as their "contented lives." So to date they have only used their 'sudden cash flow' to pay off a new truck they had bought earlier in the year, pay off the remaining mortgage on their home, make some financial investments, and give some to their five adult children.

And, what's the answer to the question at the beginning of this story? Did Bass decide to quit his job, once he realized what had happened?

"No," he said, "I'm continuing to work at FSA, and then I'll retire—as originally planned—in 2006 with 26 years of service, all with FSA."

"But," Bass quipped, "in the meantime, I *am* grinning a lot more around the office, these days." ■

—**SUE CARPENTER**

PROFILE PLUS *More About: Mary Kirtley Waters*



'Potomac Fever' bit **Mary Waters**, an Illinois native, in the late 1970s when she was a college student with a summer job on Capitol Hill. At the time, her father, a professor of livestock marketing at the University of Illinois, was on a two-year sabbatical to USDA.

"My Dad worked in USDA's South Building and every morning we'd have breakfast together there.

Then I took the Metro and worked for a relatively new Congressman from Illinois, **Ed Madigan**. And that's how I started working in DC," she said.

After completing her undergraduate work at the University of Illinois, Waters earned a law degree at George Mason University at night, while working for Rep. **Larry Hopkins** of Kentucky, a member of the House Agriculture Committee. In 1986 she joined ConAgra Foods as a senior director and legislative counsel working to build coalitions between agricultural producers and processors on agricultural and trade policy issues.

Although not a farm kid, Waters' family sold her grandparent's farm when she was 3 years old; agriculture was and is a pervasive topic in Illinois. "I remember sitting in my economics class my first year, and we had a new professor from Boston and he was talking about how shocked he was to move to central Illinois and listen to commercials about the herbicide, Treflan," she said. "And that was the first time it ever occurred to me that the rest of the country didn't listen to Treflan commercials. So agriculture kind of permeated the growing-up experience in Illinois, but I guess I didn't realize it until I went to college."

In her current position, as assistant secretary for congressional relations, Waters' office monitors legislation, making sure USDA has input on subjects that range from farm programs to food safety to natural resource

programs to the USDA budget.

"A lot of our job is just explaining what we do at USDA. I've worked in town for 20 years and I thought I really understood agriculture. Boy, when you come to work at the Department and you realize the breadth and depth of what USDA does, it's a real eye-opening experience. Members of Congress and their staffs, who may not have been here 20 years, are also surprised by it. Our job is to explain the rationale for programs, decisions, and the data and information we have here, and make it meaningful to the Members," Waters said.

In recent years the number of counties that are dependent on agriculture has been declining. But, Waters said, "The interest and, I'd say, the passion level in Congress hasn't diminished at all. It's still a very, very important constituency to Members. And so, while a lot of families like my own have gone from being on the farm into related areas, we all care about agriculture."

Last Book Read: *"Life of Pi,"* by Yann Martel

Last Movie Seen: *"Family Man"* with Nicholas Cage

Hobbies: "My husband and I have two sons who are in elementary school and middle school, ages 8 and 11. So a lot of our time away from work is focused on their activities like soccer, basketball, and baseball, and we do a lot of volunteer work at our youngest child's elementary school. So I guess that would be a hobby."

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: Scrambled eggs and bacon and biscuits—all served outdoors.

Priorities in the Months Ahead: "Working on the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization. I am really excited about that because the President has a lot of initiatives on healthy eating and concerns about obesity, especially obesity in children. So I am hoping we can come up with some new angles and programs that will encourage schools to adopt some healthier options for children."

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

Administrative *nuggets*

OIG Notes A Milestone In Its History

"Our job is to tell it like it is." Inspector General **Phyllis Fong** was describing one of the purposes of USDA's Office of Inspector General. The Department recently commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Inspector General Act of 1978.

Actually, USDA's OIG is older than that—16 years older, in fact. According to **Paula Hayes**, assistant inspector general for planning and special projects, it was created in 1962 after an agricultural fraud scheme, known as the "Billie Sol Estes scandal," was uncovered. "When OIG was administratively established by then-Secretary **Orville Freeman**," she pointed out, "it was the first nonmilitary OIG in the federal government."

Ted Haaser, who had just left the Federal Bureau of Investigation at the time, was asked to help set up this 'new OIG' at USDA. "So one of my first acts, back in 1962, was to design official credentials for the first auditors and investigators that OIG would soon be transferring or hiring," he recounted. "I designed the credentials to be green, with the USDA seal in gold, on the outside. An authorization statement and an official photo would be on the inside."

"I made one set for the Secretary, one for the Under Secretary, and one for the new head of OIG," he continued. "So then I decided I'd make the fourth set for me—and I did, and its number was 004."

Haaser ultimately served as the assistant inspector general in OIG's [then] Analysis and Evaluation Division until 1967 when he transferred to the U.S. Department of Transportation. He retired from the federal government in 1974 and presently resides in Fredericksburg, Va.

He has the distinction of being the first permanent OIG employee at USDA—and thereby also the first permanent employee in a non-military office of inspector general in the entire federal government. **Brian Haaser**, his son, is currently the special agent-in-charge of OIG's Mid-Atlantic Region, based in Beltsville, Md.

Sixteen years after USDA's OIG first started to function, the Inspector General Act of 1978 was passed. OIG senior program analyst **Marie Harte Sanchez** noted that it strengthened OIG's audit and investigative authority, while permanently establishing an OIG at USDA and at a number of other federal departments.

Subsequent legislation would also provide USDA's OIG with law

enforcement authority. "In other words," explained **Jon Novak**, acting assistant inspector general for investigations, "our special agents are armed, can make arrests, and can conduct searches and seizures."

As part of a ceremony held on November 19 at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Inspector General Act of 1978, OIG unveiled four banners designed to highlight its history and accomplishments.

According to OIG program analyst **Eileen Sanchez**, the first banner detailed the history of OIG and spotlighted some of its milestones. The remaining three banners depicted examples of actions by OIG employees to reinforce the concepts of program integrity, health and safety, and protection of assets.

"Those are just a sample of some of the things we do," Fong underscored, "as we serve as a bulwark against waste, fraud, and abuse in the delivery of USDA's programs and services to its customers and the American taxpayers." Comparable celebrations are to take place in OIG's seven regional offices throughout the country.

—RON HALL

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Healthy Forests...continued from pg. 1 million acres of federal land. Considering community wildfire protection plans—and collaborating with local communities who know best where hazard areas exist—will identify high priority areas. At least 50 percent of the funds allocated for projects will be used for this purpose.

In addition, the law instructs courts asked to halt projects to balance the short-term effects of implementing the project against the harm from undue delay and the

long-term benefits of a restored forest.

"I've had fires start nine miles away in a wilderness area and burn down toward a town," Weldon said. "What the law will do is require the court to consider the consequences of not doing 'critical work' in a small community surrounded by forests. We want to avoid seeing communities consumed by fire because work was not allowed to commence," she said.

To make the most of the law's

focus on doing the right work in the right places, Weldon said, "we have been working closely with different interested parties in the public to define the types of action we need to take for forest health and to protect communities—so that when we do have a project we have broad agreement."

For more information on the new law go to: www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/ ■



There are a lot of good stories to share about the history and accomplishments of USDA's Office of Inspector General—and these current and former OIG officials are doing just that. Gathered at a recent ceremony held to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Inspector General Act of 1978 are (L to R) current Inspector General **Phyllis Fong**, former Inspector General **Robert Beuley** who served in that position from 1986-88, **Ted Haaser**, the first permanent OIG employee at USDA as well as the first permanent employee in a non-military office of inspector general in the entire federal government, and former Inspector General **Leon Snead** who served in that position from 1990-93. Note the story on page 7.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**



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Missing: 10-23-2003 From: Lynchburg, VA
D.O.B. 5-10-1989 Sex: Male
Hair: Black Eyes: Brown
Height: 5 ft. 8 in. Weight: 145 lbs.

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